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## Brighter Smiles

### A COMPARISON (PART 2 OF 2)

If you missed last week's column, go back and take a look at it. We took a closer look at the controversy of dental amalgam. This week we'll do a brief comparison of the two most common materials to restore teeth.

#### **Amalgam's advantages**

- Silver amalgam is a more durable tooth filling material than composite resin in teeth that are subjected to a lot of biting pressure.
- An amalgam filling costs considerably less than a comparable composite filling.

#### **The disadvantages of amalgam**

- Silver fillings are less attractive than tooth-colored composite resin fillings; for this reason, they're typically not placed in teeth located near the front of your mouth.

- The mercury in amalgam fillings expands and contracts with heat and cold (think of the mercury in a thermometer). This can eventually cause the filling to fracture your tooth, so a crown will be required to restore its functionality.

- Silver fillings will eventually corrode and leak, which can cause new decay to develop underneath the filling. The leakage can also give a gray appearance to the entire tooth.

#### **Tooth-colored composite resins—the pros and cons**

Resin fillings result in a natural-looking smile. The color can be closely matched to your natural teeth, so the restorations are nearly undetectable. And because the resin compound actually bonds to your tooth, they make the tooth stronger than those restored with amalgam.

Composite resin fillings can also be made much smaller than an amalgam filling used to restore the same amount of decayed tooth, so less natural tooth structure is lost. The durability of resin tooth-filling material has not been time-tested, but continual improvements in the product have made resins nearly as durable as amalgam fillings.

#### **So where's the catch?**

In the cost. A resin filling costs about 50 to 100 percent more than a comparable silver filling. Most insurance benefits don't cover the additional cost of

composite fillings, so you must pay the difference. Do you think your insurance company really cares about you?

#### **Which to choose?**

Overall, resin fillings are a more conservative treatment, because less of your natural tooth structure needs to be removed in preparation for their placement. They also do a better job of protecting your tooth in the long run, as there's less chance that your tooth will fracture and require a crown in the future.

Ultimately, the choice is a personal one for both dentists and patients. Do amalgam's benefits outweigh the possible risks? Are tooth-colored fillings worth the significant extra cost? Which filling material will prove to be most cost-effective in the long run? We recommend that you research your options, discuss them with your dental healthcare providers, and choose the filling material that's right for you, based on what you've learned.

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